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CHAPTER 7

SHUN-TI AND THE END OF YÜAN RULE IN CHINA

YUAN CHINA AT THE ACCESSION OF TOGHON TEMUR (SHUN-TI)

When Toghön Temür, barely thirteen years of age, was brought to the summer capital, Shang-tu, and installed there as the tenth emperor of the Yüan dynasty in July 1333, the realm he nominally headed had long been under stress, owing in part to complex, endemic tensions among its ruling elites and in part to troubles of long standing in China itself. Although there was no sign of imminent collapse, it is still a little ironic that of all the Yüan emperors, it was his reign, the last in China, that turned out to be the longest. It is not so ironic that as passive a ruler as he turned out to be, the whole quality of political life during his reign came to constitute a powerful negative example to the builders of the next dynasty, the Ming. Toghön Temür (often referred to by his temple name, Shun-ti) reigned in China, or at least Ta-tu, until 1368.¹ He died in Mongolia in 1370. The history of his reign raises the grand question, Why did the Yüan dynasty fall as and when it did? To that question there appears to be no simple answer. There was certainly no lack of energetic effort on the part of Mongols and Chinese alike to save it.

The younger emperor inherited a system of government whose size, complexity, and costliness stemmed both from its need to provide offices and employment for a large minority population of privileged Mongols and foreigners and from the fact that although the state was mainly a public bureaucracy, it was in part also the private patrimony of the imperial house and of certain high-ranking elites. A short description of these special features, as they had evolved by 1333, will serve to give some background to the march of events during Toghön Temür's troubled reign.

There was not one imperial capital, but two. The principal capital was Ta-tu (on the site of modern Peking), and the summer capital was Shang-tu, some

¹ Toghön Temür was given the posthumous name Shun-ti by the Ming court. For a brief biography, see Herbert Franke, "Toghon Temür," in the *Dictionary of Ming biography*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang (New York, 1976), pp. 1289-93.

two hundred miles north in the steppes of Inner Mongolia. Toghōn Temür was enthroned in July 1333 in Shang-tu and returned to Ta-tu in September or October. Subsequently he faithfully removed his court to Shang-tu every summer, as a remnant of the nomadic life-style of his forebears. Each year, until the destruction of Shang-tu by Chinese rebels in January 1359 put an end to the custom, in the fourth lunar month Toghōn Temür moved north and in the eighth returned to Ta-tu. The trip north was time-consuming: In 1347 it took twenty-three days.² Thus the emperor spent about a month and a half on the move each year, traveling at the leisurely pace of about ten miles per day. Each year he took with him a large retinue of officials, who worked from "branch" offices in Shang-tu during the summer months. These annual circuits were accomplished at a cost no one has yet tried to calculate, and they involved a great array of logistical support systems, transport and courier services, and a host of special traveling agencies. In the 1330s and 1340s, two southern Chinese literati-officials, Huang Chin and Hu Chu, wrote enthusiastic, poetic descriptions of these scenic journeys and of the summer capital. Hu Chu's, the earlier such description, elicited a great deal of favorable comment.³

The main capital, too, impressed the literati from south China, and it is to them we owe several late descriptions and accounts, ranging from the young Hu Chu's awed reactions to its magnificence and opulence set amid a large population of very poor people (it was an expensive place to live), to T'ao Tsung-i's detailed notes on it, and to Hsiao Hsün's careful inventory, written in 1368, just before the new Ming government deliberately demolished the city.⁴ The outer walls measured 28.6 kilometers around. The walled imperial compound toward the city's southern edge, with its central court, palaces, and lake, took up approximately a twelfth of the entire intramural urban area (see Map 33).

That the Yüan regime still encompassed a patrimonial dimension is evident in the existence of what amounted to a sort of semipublic, superficially bureaucratized business empire with holdings in such fields as farming, palace and temple construction, and manufacturing. Manufacturing took in everything from the procurement of raw materials to the shipment, storage, and distribution of an astounding range of items, mainly luxury goods. Some three hundred workshops and other enterprises, mostly in north China, drew on a labor pool of registered hereditary artisan households to turn out fabrics of all kinds, foodstuffs, beverages, jewelry, carriages, ironware, felt, tiles,

2 Huang Chin (1277-1357), *Huang Wen-hsien chi* (TSCC ed.), 7, pp. 71b-72b.

3 Hu Chu (1276-ca. 1353), *Ch'un-pai chai lei kao* (TSCC ed.), 2, pp. 5a ff.

4 Hou Jen-chih and Chin T'ao, *Pei-ching shih hua* (Shanghai, 1980), pp. 61-95.

leather goods, and much more.⁵ Their output was consumed directly by the upper echelons of the conquest elite; some of it was also put on sale in the stores of the capital. The owners of these businesses were the members of the imperial family, their consorts, and the highest court officials; but the emperor could and did reassign these assets, and political overturn at the top ensured their periodic confiscation and redistribution.

Counting patrimonial as well as civilian and military posts and their authorized support staff, the Yüan bureaucracy numbered some 33,000 at the beginning of Toghon Temür's reign. It was a multinational body, as roughly 30 percent of all positions were occupied by non-Chinese. Statutory specifications reserved certain positions for members of one or another ethnic group, but these specifications were often quietly circumvented and on occasion were openly disregarded or revised.

Most government offices regularly employed a mixture of people of different ethnic origins, and modes of accommodation had to be worked out in order that the work of government might proceed smoothly.⁶ Official procedure required uneasy compromises between the Chinese sense of hierarchy and personal authority and responsibility and the Mongol conciliar tradition. Functions of state were performed in at least four written languages: standard literary Chinese; a strangely colloquialized chancery Chinese; Mongolian; and to judge from the regular assignment of "Muslim" (Hui-hui) clerks to important government bodies, probably also Persian.⁷ Translators and interpreters were regular employees of bureaucratic agencies.

It all worked better than one might suppose. Deliberate efforts were constantly made to foster ethnic cohesion in officialdom in the only way that it could be done: by encouraging loyalties to specific institutions. For example, late in the Yüan, a large number of stone inscriptions (*t'i ming chi*) were carved and displayed to advertise the duties and the signal importance of various government agencies, high and low, and to list the names of all the current incumbents of their offices, thus to build a sense of common purpose among all the different kinds of people who held the positions. There still remains a complete history of one Yüan office, the Directorate of the Palace Library, which was compiled as late as the 1360s, and it shows how persistent a sense of institutional identity could be for the Chinese, Mongols, Muslims, and other ethnic elements that made up its large staff.⁸ Politically the most

5 Li Kan, *Yuan tai she hui ching chi shih kao* (Wuhan, 1985), pp. 229–43 (tables); and Ōshima Ritsuko, "The *chiang-hu* in the Yüan," *Acta Asiatica*, 45 (1983), pp. 69–95.

6 Elizabeth Endicott-West, "Imperial governance in Yüan times," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 46, (1986), pp. 523–49, touches on this problem.

7 Huang Shijian, "The Persian language in China during the Yüan dynasty," *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 34 (1986), pp. 83–95.

8 Wang Shih-tien (fl. 14th c.), ed., *Pi shu chien chih* (SKCS ed.).

important manifestation of interethnic institutional cohesion in Toghön Temür's reign was to be found in the Censorate, whose members insisted on their right of remonstrance and who therefore played a pivotal role in high-level political processes right to the end of the Yüan dynasty.

Foreign participation in government helped bloat its size. To take one example, the high court of justice, whose jurisdiction was limited to cases involving Mongols or aliens in the two capitals, employed a staff of ninety-six, headed by forty-two Mongolian judges (*jarghuchi*), each of whom held the very high civil service rank of 1B and enjoyed the accompanying high salary and perquisites.⁹ The problem of overstaffing (*jung kuan*) was voiced occasionally at court in Toghön Temür's time, but for political reasons the Yüan ascendancy was never able to go too far for too long in cutting supernumerary positions, despite the shortages of revenue.

There were several recruitment paths for the bureaucracy in the late Yüan. Most lower officials served an apprenticeship as clerks or Confucian school-teachers. Young members of the conquest elite (and some Chinese) were first groomed and informally scrutinized as *kesigden*, hereditary guards or housemen to the monarch and his family. The descendants of three warriors who had been Chinggis Khan's closest comrades headed this corps, which came to number some thirteen thousand young men, and it has been characterized as a "cradle of officialdom" and the "citadel of the Yüan ruling class."¹⁰ The *kesigden* enjoyed what was known in Chinese as *ken chiao*, literally, "roots and feet," an invidious reference to their having an aristocratic leg up on everyone else.

The triennial Confucian examination system, instituted in 1315, was statistically a minor port of entry into the lower bureaucracy (there was a total of only some 550 *chin shih* degree holders by 1333, at most 2 percent of the officials), but as a matter of politics it was crucial. The system was heavily weighted in favor of Mongols (a small pool of candidates and an easy examination) and against southern Chinese (a huge pool of candidates and a demanding examination), yet despite these statutory inequalities, the system did create a common outlook and interethnic cohesion among the degree holders.

The examination round of 1333, which had begun in the spring, ended with the final palace examination in the ninth lunar month of that year, shortly after the young emperor's return to Ta-tu from Shang-tu.¹¹ This was the first examination under the Yüan to produce its full quota for all ethnic groups,

⁹ Sung Lien et al., eds., *Yüan shih* (Peking, 1976), 87, pp. 2187–8 (hereafter cited as *YS*).

¹⁰ Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, *The military establishment of the Yuan dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 39–44; see also his *Yüan tai shih hsin t'an* (Taipei, 1983), pp. 141–230.

¹¹ Sung Chiung (1294–1346), *Yen-shih chi* (SKCS ed.), 15, p. 13a.

clear evidence of growing interest in the examinations and the spread of higher education. The graduation list from that year is still extant.¹² It shows, among other things, that the fifty Chinese were, as a group, a bit older than the fifty non-Chinese, with median ages (*sui*) of thirty-one and twenty-eight, respectively. It also shows that 92 percent of the Chinese were married, as against only 74 percent for the others. Interestingly, the Mongols and members of other minorities were heavily intermarried with Chinese: In all, 58 percent of them had Chinese mothers, and of those married, nearly 70 percent had Chinese wives. Everyone, irrespective of ethnic origin, tended to receive similar kinds of first appointments as local officials. The second name on the non-Chinese list is Yü Ch'üeh, a Tangut of undistinguished ancestry from Honan Province and, in that sense, typical of the obscure, non-Chinese youth for whom the examinations were the likeliest road to fame and fortune. Yü Ch'üeh will be met later as an outstanding local official and reformer. He also became a talented poet and litterateur in Chinese; his works still survive.¹³

The *chin-shih* class list of 1333 thus captures for a certain moment in time some of the intricate cleavages and blendings that characterized the Yüan ascendancy: institutionalized ethnic preference alongside widespread intermarriage; a conquest society well on the way to assimilating some of the moral values and literary and administrative traditions of its colonial inferiors; and a Chinese elite that had come actively and fully to participate in the foreign dynasty that ruled them.

Yüan government in 1333 still weighed unevenly on the two principal regions of China, the north and the south. Especially striking was the maintenance of so dense a network of local administrative units in north China, a region that had borne the brunt of the wars of the Mongol conquest and had then suffered further depopulation by continual emigration to the south or to the cities, repeatedly visited as it was by floods, earthquakes, droughts, locust infestations, epidemics, and famine.¹⁴ Yang Wei-chen did not exaggerate when stating (in 1348) that the population of an entire northern county (*hsien*) was often smaller than that of a single southern Chinese lineage (*tsu*).¹⁵ South China, much richer and more heavily settled, was, as a matter of deliberate policy, more lightly administered. In proportion to its population, its local government officials were only one-fifth as numerous as those in the north, and its population paid nothing approaching the north's rates of

12 Fully annotated in Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, "Yüan-t'ung yuan nien chin shih lu chiao chu," *Shih huo yueh k'an*, 13 (1983), pp. 72-90, 147-62.

13 Yü Ch'üeh (1303-58), *Ch'ing-yang hsien sheng wen chi* (SPTK ed.).

14 Contemporary references to these conditions are quoted in Aritaka Iwao, "Gendai no nōmin seikatsu ni tsuite," in *Kuwabara Hakushi kanreki kinen Toyōshi ronsō* (Kyoto, 1934), pp. 979 ff.; and Wu Han, "Yüan ti kuo chih peng k'uei yü Ming chih chien kuo," *Ch'ing-hua hsieh pao*, 11 (1936), pp. 359-423.

15 Yang Wei-chen (1296-1370), *Tung-wei-tzu wen chi* (SPTK ed.), 4, pp. 9b-10b.

taxation. By way of tacit compensation for this disparity, the northern Chinese were officially favored over the southern, especially in the matter of eligibility for bureaucratic positions.

Finally, in 1333, the Yüan dynasty was funding itself from a wide variety of sources. Besides taxes on land and commerce, there were state cash investments in many commercial enterprises, and outright state control of farms and especially of saltworks. By 1333, income from the national salt monopoly had steadily risen to provide a maximum of some 7.6 million ingots (*ting*; each nominally equivalent to 50 ounces of silver) in paper cash yearly, enough to meet about 80 percent of central revenue needs. A sea transport system moved vast quantities of grain from the Yangtze delta up to Ta-tu, where it fed the whole conquest establishment, plus the large numbers of poor people and dependents of all kinds who inhabited the city, and provided grain for the Mongolian people living in the steppes to the north. These vital shipments peaked in 1329. Soon thereafter the amounts began to slide, at first gradually (there was a 25 percent shortfall by 1341) and then catastrophically. The Yüan dynasty had almost exhausted further possibilities for raising income and in fact would soon be caught between diminishing revenues and rising costs.¹⁶

So much for a short *tour d'horizon* of late Yüan China at Toghön Temür's accession, two decades before things began to fall apart. It is important to bear in mind how close all these events were to the age of Khubilai (r. 1260–94), even though eight emperors had come and gone in the meantime. Several senior officials in their sixties in 1333 had come of age and begun their careers in the time of the dynasty's founder. Khubilai was still very much a living memory, as Bayan's chancellorship would show.

TOGHON TEMÜR'S ENTHRONEMENT AND BAYAN'S CHANCELLORSHIP, 1333–1340

It is not absolutely certain who Toghön Temür really was. In 1340, he officially and publicly asserted that he was indeed a legitimate descendant of Khubilai, in the sixth generation, the elder son of the assassinated emperor Khoshila (posthumous temple name, Ming-tsung; r. 1329) and a Qarluq (Turkish) consort. However, Tugh Temür (posthumous temple name, Wen-tsung; r. 1328, 1329–32) had earlier issued an edict (drafted by Yü Chi, one of the most respected and influential of the Chinese literati of his time) that

¹⁶ The principal work on Yüan finance is still that by Herbert Franke, *Geld und Wirtschaft in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft: Beiträge zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Yüan-Zeit* (Leipzig, 1949). See also Herbert F. Schurmann, *Economic structure of the Yüan dynasty: Translation of chapters 93 and 94 of the Yüan shih* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956; repr. 1967).

declared, apparently on the authority of the husband of Toghōn Temür's wet nurse, that Toghōn Temür was not really Khoshila's son.¹⁷ There was also a story, widely believed, that Toghōn Temür was actually the son of a Chinese father (a descendant of the Sung emperors) and a Muslim mother and that Khoshila had adopted him.¹⁸ Accordingly, Toghōn Temür had been exiled at the age of ten to an island off the coast of Korea and, at the age of twelve, removed to what is now Kuei-lin in Kwangsi Province, where he reportedly spent the year before his recall and enthronement taking lessons from a Buddhist monk in the *Analects* and the *Hsiao ching* (Book of filial piety) and making friends with a troop of monkeys, symbols of his birth year (1320).

Upon Tugh Temür (Wen-tsung)'s death in September 1332, Toghōn Temür was bypassed in favor of his younger half-brother Irinjibal, a child of six, but that child died in December 1332, after reigning for only two months. There followed an interregnum for the next seven months, during which time the kingmakers of Ta-tu maneuvered on behalf of their favorite candidates. The politically dominant clique, that of El Temür and his kinsmen, backed the candidacy of Tugh Temür's young heir, El Tegüs. El Tegüs's mother, Budashiri, argued that El Tegüs was still too young and recommended that he instead be made the heir apparent to Toghōn Temür. She eventually got her way, in part by allowing El Temür to marry one of his daughters to Toghōn Temür, but most of all because she won the support of Bayan, a Mongol of the Merkid tribe, who was on the verge of becoming the dominant political personality of his time. He was already a senior official with concurrent leading positions in the Bureau of Military Affairs (or Privy Council, *Shu mi yüan*), various praetorian guard units, and inner-palace agencies. As a result of his assistance in securing Toghōn Temür's succession, in 1333 Bayan finally obtained the highest civil appointment of all, the chancellorship of the right (grand councillor of the right, *yu ch'eng hsiang*). In 1335, he became chancellor (*ch'eng hsiang*) pure and simple, a position that he held from 1333 until his overthrow in 1340.

Clearly, Toghōn Temür's intended role was that of a temporary figurehead. He was a thirteen-year-old child, untrained, still officially illegitimate, and easily disposable; indeed, he was advised to stay in the shadows and take no direct part in ruling the empire. He later stated, surely with some truth, that he had spent his early years as emperor in constant fear. It was a very shaky beginning for what turned out to be a long, if somewhat passive, reign.

In the summer of 1335, Chancellor Bayan carried out a bloody coup

17 John D. Langlois, Jr., "Yü Chi and his Mongol sovereign: The scholar as apologist," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 38 (1978), p. 111; *YS*, 181, p. 4180.

18 The case in favor of this story has been pressed by Wan Ssu-t'ung (1638-1702) in *Keng shen chün i shih*, repr. in vol. 4 of *Shih liao ts'ung pien* (Taipei, 1968).

against the surviving members of the family of his former colleague El Temür, all of whom he charged with treason. He then set in motion an extraordinary program of reaction, designed, as the *Yüan shih* (Official history of the Yüan) has it, to "impose the old regulations."¹⁹ Toghön Temür's reign title (*nien hao*) was changed to Chih-yüan, exactly the same as the title Khubilai had used from 1264 to 1294. With all possible literalism, Bayan seized the calendar, turned its pages back to the era of the Yüan founding, and restarted it. What could that have possibly meant? Why did he do it?

Bayan's personal experiences provide a few clues. He and his ancestors had been *kesigden*, hereditary housemen to the khaghan and his family. As a youth, Bayan had served as warrior-houseman to Prince Khaishan, and for bravery in action in the last of the steppe wars (1300-6), he was awarded the title *ba'atur* (valiant) at a traditional princely convention, or *khuriltai*. When Khaishan became emperor (posthumous temple name, Wu-tsung; r. 1307-11), Bayan assumed a series of high central posts and military commands in China. After 1311, he served effectively in high-level provincial positions, during which time he donated large tracts of farmland (given to him by the emperor) to the *kesig* and to the Tibetan Buddhist hierarch who was chaplain to the Yüan court. In 1328 he had been a major power behind the succession of Khaishan's son Tugh Temür (Wen-tsung). He was, as his biography says, "resolute, serious, intelligent, and decisive,"²⁰ at least in his earlier years. All this appears to draw a portrait of an aristocrat of long and wide experience, with deep personal, ethnic, and institutional loyalties to the more specifically Mongolian side of that Sino-Mongolian hybrid, the Yüan dynasty.

It is clear that Bayan believed that things had drifted in undesirable directions in the forty years since Khubilai's death and that he wanted to restore the status quo ante. But whatever that might mean, it was in no way clarified by the imperial edict that announced the readoption of the Chih-yüan reign title. The edict spoke vaguely of portents of celestial warning. It said that although the realm was enjoying prosperity and peace, the astrologers had noted irregularities and that these called for improving government by way of reviving the old norms (*chiu tien*) that had worked so well under Khubilai.²¹ In other words, major and perhaps painful changes were promised, at a time when things were officially acknowledged to be fairly quiet in the realm. Because there was no general sense of crisis, because there was no broad spectrum of political and moral support for what he was trying to do, and because his program lacked clear definition, Bayan was soon obliged to use some very forceful means to impose his will.

¹⁹ YS, 138, p. 3338.

²⁰ YS, 138, p. 3335.

²¹ YS, 38, p. 830.

In all that follows, it is important to try to establish what Bayan himself had in mind and to distinguish that from what his many opponents, Chinese and non-Chinese alike, believed that he had in mind.

There were two main parts to Bayan's reforms. One part, often overlooked, stemmed from his considerable administrative knowledge and experience in China, and it aimed at alleviating distress and improving the general welfare of the realm. Palace expenditures were cut (with the expenditure levels of Khubilai's era sometimes used as a target); the salt monopoly quotas were reduced; and conscientious and continuing efforts were made to provide timely and appropriate relief to areas throughout the country that had been stricken by famine and other disasters. So far, so good.

It was the other part of his effort, the attempt to reestablish the ruling system as Bayan thought Khubilai had originally designed it, that in the end proved impossible to carry through. What this mainly entailed was reimposing in both the military and political spheres the sharp lines of ethnic separation that, in Bayan's view, constituted the absolute bedrock of Yüan rule in China. To attempt this amounted to putting half a century of history into reverse, and evidently Bayan had no idea at the outset just how difficult that would be.

Cultural and social relationships among the Mongols, other foreigners, and the native Chinese elites of north and south had long obscured the once-simple ethnic distinctions, which were now shot through with ambiguities and complex cross-shadings. Many ambitious Chinese had accommodated themselves to Mongol ways by adopting Mongolian names (a practice Bayan frowned upon), learning the Mongolian language, intermarrying, and, in a variety of ways, insinuating themselves into the Mongolian power structure. On the other side of the coin, many Mongols and other foreigners found China and the Chinese congenial.

Take, for example, A-jung (d. ca. 1335), a Mongol of the Kereyid tribe, a *kesigdei* to the same Khaishan whom Bayan had served, and a competent civil and military administrator — in short, someone to all appearances much like Bayan. But A-jung went culturally in a wholly different direction from Bayan: He liked gambling, hunting, and playing ball, and he was also a student of Chinese history and an admirer of south China's lush landscapes. He owned a Hunan retreat called the Plum Moon Estate where he planted several hundred plum trees²² and enjoyed his cultivated pleasures in the close company of Chinese literati. Bayan's reimposition of ethnic separatism had the effect of placing in doubt interethnic personal relationships such as these, as well as patronage and career expectations. Therefore, Bayan's plans had no appeal what-

22 Sung Chiung, *Yen-shih chi*, 8, pp. 13a-15a; YS, 143, pp. 3420-1.

soever to A-jung (who mournfully predicted to Yü Chi that Bayan would soon abolish the Confucian examination system) or to the many others like him. At the elite level, foreigners and Chinese could no longer be cleanly separated. This was at the heart of the political troubles encountered by Bayan's program.

Specifically, Bayan's reassertion of the foreign ascendancy in China certainly included the disarming of all Chinese (and Koreans) and the confiscation of their horses. He forbade the Chinese henceforth from learning Mongolian or foreign scripts, although the measure was soon rescinded, and he reserved a range of leading positions in the bureaucracy exclusively for the Mongols and foreigners in China. It may have been zealous local officials, rather than Bayan himself, who ordered the confiscation of all iron agricultural tools and outlawed Chinese opera and storytelling. It was no part of Bayan's actual policies, but it was indeed indicative of the mass psychology of the time and the apprehension that his policies aroused among the Chinese, that the chancellor was widely believed to have ordered a nationwide roundup of all unmarried Chinese children and the extermination of all Chinese bearing the five most common surnames.

One of Bayan's actual measures that provoked intense opposition at the elite level was his cancellation late in 1335 of the examination system. This measure affected all ethnic categories: northern Chinese, southern Chinese, Mongols, and other foreigners. In particular it dashed not only the career hopes of educated Chinese, but also those of many young Mongols and foreigners who lived in the provinces of China, without access to the *kesig* or to influential people in the capital. Much of their lives and energies had been focused on studious preparation for the examinations. What, then, was the point of abolishing the system and arousing their opposition?

There is no simple answer. The decree canceling the examinations did not venture to offer a rationale. When challenged later, Bayan was unable to offer a satisfactory defense of the measure. Still, he stood firm, and the examinations scheduled for 1336 and 1339 were never held.

The most articulate proponent of abolishing the examinations was not Bayan, but Cherig Temür of the Turkic Arghun tribe. Like Bayan, he had served in the *kesig* as a youth and had then had a distinguished career as a high-level administrator and military commander. No extremist, Cherig Temür was knowledgeable and competent and particularly experienced in handling famine relief. What distressed him about the examinations was the expense they entailed: He had witnessed the commandeering of state transport and the outlay of scarce resources to make the arrangements for the examinations at the provincial level. He also urged that the school subsidies earmarked for examination candidates be used instead to support the *kesigden*.²³

²³ YS, 142, pp. 3403-6.

Yet the issue went much further than that; it was not solely a matter of reducing expenses and reallocating resources. Khubilai had never held examinations. Since their institution in 1315, newly minted *chin shih* had enjoyed something of an unfair advantage in competing with young clerks and translators for entry-level positions in the regular bureaucracy, and they had, or were thought to have, better chances for subsequent promotion. Holding a degree was beginning to challenge service in the *kesig* for prestige. But a *chin shih* degree was no guarantee of administrative competence: Bayan himself and many others stood witness to that. Rather, abolishing the examinations was a way to underscore the value of aristocratic hereditary privilege and of demonstrated practical experience. In preparation for government service, the study of the Confucian canon, though certainly not proscribed, was relegated to a secondary position.

So much for the reforms. Following aristocratic custom, after his rise to the chancellorship Bayan began to accumulate vast personal assets. Chinese sources hostile to Bayan are careful to list these in detail. He also came to hold a first-class princely fief and an awesome range of concurrent official positions over central and palace organs, capital guard units, and patrimonial business agencies. So crowded were the streets with officials when Bayan's birthday was celebrated in 1338 that one elderly Chinese official of high rank was nearly trampled to death.²⁴ The chancellor's own progresses through the capital featured a large and impressive military escort that reportedly made the emperor's entourage look modest by comparison. Perhaps Bayan, his political aims at least superficially achieved, was beginning to grow complacent and corrupt.

But his position remained insecure. Bayan soon found he had enemies among a higher stratum of aristocracy than his own. Four enemies whom he prosecuted were princes of the blood. One of them, Chechegtü (prince of T'an), posted in command of troops in Mongolia, was arrested in 1338, brought to Ta-tu, and publicly executed outside one of the east gates. That was perceived as a grossly unjust act. The prince was held in popular esteem in the capital, and his standing was also high in Confucian circles in south China, because he had kept a southern scholar at his court for a time and had respected his advice.²⁵

And far down the social scale, out in the provinces of China, ominous commotions came to Bayan's attention. There were several small-scale millenarian uprisings in Honan, Kwangtung, and Kiangsi, which were quickly

24 Yang Yü (1285–1361), *Shan chü hsin hua* (TSCC ed.), p. 17a. This work has been translated by Herbert Franke; see his *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Chinas unter der Mongolenherrschaft: Das Shan-kiu sin-hua des Yang Yü* (Wiesbaden, 1956).

25 Wei Su (1303–72), *Wei T'ai-p'u chi* (Wu-hsing, 1913), 8, pp. 8a–9b.

suppressed, but Bayan was quick to suspect that much wider conspiracies lay behind them. Late in 1339, a frustrated and unhappy Chinese clerk named Fan Meng carried out a mass murder of officials and seized Pien-liang, the provincial capital of Honan. He was soon caught and killed, but Bayan insisted that a huge Chinese conspiracy lay behind this incident, too, and demanded the most vigorous investigation and prosecution of everyone even remotely implicated, as well as a general purge of ethnic Chinese from certain sensitive bureaucratic positions.

It was all too much. There were too many presumed enemies. Bayan's chancellorship had come to something of a dead end. The principal engineer of Bayan's ouster was none other than his nephew Toghtō, a young man to whom he had accorded every kind of preferential treatment. In March 1340, in a very carefully arranged coup, Bayan was removed from all his offices and banished, first to Honan and then to the far south. He died in April on the way to banishment.

TOGHTO AND HIS OPPOSITION, 1340-1355

The coup against Bayan represented to some degree a revolt of a younger generation of Mongols against an older one, a generation more acclimatized to China than its predecessors had been. With the demise of Bayan, the effort to restore the era of Khubilai was dead as a political ideal. Political conflict shifted to wholly new ideological ground.

Toghtō was about twenty-six years of age and well on the way to becoming the most brilliant figure of his time. He is described as having been tall and strong and a superior bowman. He had had ten years of grooming in the *kesig*, had served in leadership positions in the palace, and had developed impressive skills in backstairs intrigue. He had a modicum of Confucian learning as well, absorbed from his southern Chinese family tutor, Wu Chih-fang.

As things turned out, Toghtō would have two terms as chancellor of the right: from 1340 to 1344 and from 1349 to 1355. As things also turned out, late Yüan political history at the central level came to assume a certain periodic rhythm, with different administrations succeeding each other, each using a different set of guiding ideas, on average about every five years. Thus after Bayan had dominated the scene from 1333 to 1340, there followed Toghtō, from 1340 to 1344. An interlude dominated mainly by Berke Bukha lasted from 1344 to 1349, and this was followed by Toghtō's return to power, from 1349 to 1355. After 1355, the rhythm was broken, as the breakup of the Yüan realm was by then well under way, and the beleaguered central government no longer had effective political control of the country,

although it still remained a focus of loyalty and a source of legitimacy even in some of the parts of China that it no longer directly governed.

At first glance, the study of these post-Bayan administrations seems unconnected to an understanding of the imminent collapse of the dynasty, because none of them lacked for ideas or élan and all were willing to take on and remedy the major problems of the time and to make changes. Hardly effete and no longer reactionary, high administration after the fall of Bayan came into the hands of vigorous men of insight and capability. Under Toghto, the approach to political solutions was predominantly centralist. Under Berke Bukha, the approach was just the reverse – to give as wide a latitude as possible to provincial and local initiative. It seems highly problematical where responsibility for the Yüan collapse should be assigned: to the leaders personally, to systemic flaws, or to crisis conditions in China too overwhelming for any government to handle?

Toghtō's first administration certainly exhibited fresh new spirit. The young leader was quick to distinguish his regime as something wholly different from Bayan's. A new reign title was decreed to show this. Bayan's purges were called off. Positions that Bayan had closed to the Chinese were reopened to them. Many of the great Chinese literati came back to the capital from voluntary retirement or from administrative exile. The examination system was restored. Bayan's old adherents were dismissed. Bayan himself died in exile only a month after his removal.

Toghtō also gave a few early signs of a new and positive direction in central government. He spearheaded an effort – ultimately unsuccessful for technical reasons – to provide an all-water transport route from the sea through the capital to the Shansi foothills.²⁶ Following that came a project, this time successful, to find funds for and finish the long-stalled official histories of the Liao, Chin, and Sung dynasties.²⁷

The administration also permitted a new visibility to the emperor Toghōn Temür. Now nineteen, he had been allowed a minor role in the planning of the anti-Bayan coup. In July 1340, the young emperor issued a posthumous denunciation of his uncle Tugh Temür and rid himself of his palace handlers and rivals. He sent his aunt Budashiri, the grand empress dowager, into exile and also arranged the exile, and possibly also the subsequent murder, of his cousin and designated successor, El Tegüs. His own infant son, Ayushiridara, he entrusted to Toghtō's household for feeding and care. The ruler now began

26 See John W. Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians: Aspects of political change in late Yuan China* (New York, 1973), pp. 79–80.

27 On the latter, see Hok-lam Chan, "Chinese official historiography at the Yüan court: The composition of the Liao, Chin, and Sung histories," in *China under Mongol rule*, ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton, 1981), pp. 56–106.

to appear in person to conduct Confucian state sacrifices, to listen to Confucian lectures, and to host state banquets.

In June 1344, after a series of local rebellions had broken out in widely scattered areas of China, the emperor accepted Toghtō's unusual request to resign his office.²⁸ The several short-lived administrations that followed from 1344 and 1349 developed an agenda very different from Toghtō's, for some compelling reasons. The cumulative effects of years of natural disasters throughout China, together with the continued spread of banditry and other signs of civil disorder, demanded that central government give special attention to improving provincial and local administration so as to handle these problems. Mainly this required two things: ensuring the appointment of men of quality and ability to local positions and giving those people discretionary authority in handling relief and other problems – in effect, decentralizing national relief efforts.

One of the principal figures of this period, Berke Bukha, had been an effective provincial official and had discovered at first hand (when dealing with the aftermath of the great Hangchow fire of 1341) that one had to violate central regulations in order to issue relief before it was too late.²⁹ Similarly, local military garrisons needed blanket authorization in order to combat roving bandits. And in handling disasters or civil disturbances, local officials needed to dictate less and to do more to gain the cooperation of the local people. In 1345, the administration sent out twelve investigation teams, each headed jointly by a Chinese and a non-Chinese official, to visit every part of the realm, correct abuses, and do whatever was needed to "create benefits and remove harm" for the people. Also, the boundaries of some local jurisdictions in Honan were carefully redrawn in order to coordinate more efficiently the antibandit efforts.³⁰

Toghōn Temür was encouraged to participate in certain aspects of this new program. In person he exhorted newly appointed local officials to achieve good results, and he took part in rewarding and promoting those who had done outstanding work at the local level.

Yet, far from abating under this new administrative approach, troubles mounted in Yüan China in the 1340s. The troubles appeared to be of such a nature, or on such a scale, that piecemeal initiatives by local officials, or local conciliation, were inadequate to deal with them. The central government was now also faced with chronic revenue shortfalls. Maritime grain shipments

28 For the details, see Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, pp. 80–1.

29 Sung Lien (1310–81), *Sung Wen-hsien kung ch'üan chi* (SPPY ed.), 49, pp. 6b–11a; Yang Yü, *Shan chu hsin hua*, pp. 35a–36b; YS, 51, p. 1100, and 138, p. 3366.

30 For the latter, see Su T'ien-chüeh (1294–1352), *Tzu hsi wen kao*; repr. in vol. 3 of *Yuan tai chen pen wen chi hui k'än* (Taipei, 1970), pp. 12a–15a; Yang Wei-chien, *Tung-wei-tzu wen chi*, 4, pp. 9b–10b.

had not only seriously declined, from a peak of 3.34 million bushels in 1329 to 2.6 million in 1342; but beginning in 1348, they continued only at the pleasure of a major piratical operation led by Fang Kuo-chen and his brothers, whom the authorities had failed to suppress and therefore tried to conciliate.³¹ In addition to that, the Yellow River, swelled by prolonged rains, kept breaching its dikes and finally began shifting its course, creating widespread havoc and ruin.³² A different administrative strategy seemed to be in order, and after some complex struggles within the bureaucracy, in August 1349 the emperor recalled Toghtō to office as chancellor of the right. Radical solutions were now sought and implemented.

Enthusiasm ran high among Toghtō and his partisans. It reportedly was said at the time that

the earlier [Yüan] prime ministers lacked renown, and nothing in the way of ceremonial, literary, or institutional achievement is remembered of them. But [Toghto] wants to undertake great acts and dazzle the world; he wants to surpass the old methods of the ancestors, and leave behind an immortal name in the historical records.³³

It may be argued that these words accurately capture the euphoria of the moment. Surely none of what followed would even have been attempted without there having been a powerful belief in government circles that all crises were soluble, that the world could be remade overnight on orders from the top.

All of Toghtō's new plans entailed central direction and control.³⁴ New ideas from below were welcomed, but once accepted, it was the central government that implemented them. Regional or local initiative was now heavily restricted.

To take Toghtō's major projects in their chronological order, the first answered the need to find more revenue immediately. It was not thought feasible to try to increase rates on the traditional tax sources (land, salt, commerce, etc.), most of which were continuing to shrink. Consequently the decision was taken late in 1350 to print a new issue of (inadequately backed) paper currency – two million ingots' worth in the first run in 1351 – and to circulate it by way of government payments for materials and labor.³⁵

31 See Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, pp. 88–9.

32 See *ibid.*, p. 87.

33 Ch'üan Heng (fl. 14th c.), *Keng shen wai shih*; repr. as vol. 3 of *Shih liao ts'ung pien* (Taipei, 1968), pp. 19a–b. This translation differs slightly from both that in Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, pp. 96–97, and that in Helmut Schulte-Uffelage, trans. and ed., *Das Keng-shen wai-shih: Eine Quelle zur späten Mongolenzeit* (Berlin, 1963), p. 56.

34 For a detailed account of Toghtō's second regime, see Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, pp. 95–118.

35 Yüan money is the subject of a large bibliography. The standard Western-language authority is still Herbert Franke's *Geld und Wirtschaft in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft*. A recent contribution is Nancy S. Steinhardt's "Currency issues of Yüan China," *Bulletin of Sung and Yüan Studies*, 16 (1980), pp. 59–81.

Following the instant solution of the financial question, the government next announced, in April 1351, its plan to tame the Yellow River, by rechanneling it along its lower course, so that it would again flow into the sea south of the Shantung peninsula. There was much opposition to this idea, and Toghtō and his people were well aware that nothing like it had ever been done before. Yet, funded by the new currency issue, the Yellow River-rerouting project was begun in May and was brought to a successful conclusion in December of the same year, 1351; 170,000 troops and civilian workers took part in the work. An official commemorative inscription by Ou-yang Hsüan celebrates this triumph of hydraulic engineering in great technical detail.³⁶

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1351, there broke out in the Huai valley region, at some distance from the river project, first one, then another, and then still another popular uprising in what rapidly spread to become a nationwide social explosion of extraordinary proportions, as bandits, religious sectarians, and other dissidents ran amok, moving from place to place capturing administrative cities, pillaging stores, killing officials, and settling local scores. These rebellions are described at great length elsewhere.³⁷ Suffice it to relate here that far from reeling in shock from this catastrophic outbreak of disorder, Toghtō and his people acknowledged it, quickly accepted the challenge of dealing with it, and over the next three years (by 1354) definitely gained the upper hand. In a sense, central authority came to view national pacification as one more large-scale problem that it was already equipped and competent to deal with.

It has been asserted that owing to corruption, mismanagement, and the like, the regular Yüan armies had grown too decadent to defend the dynasty from these upheavals.³⁸ There may be much truth in this assertion, but the fact remains that no matter what their condition or state of training, there were never at any time enough regular Yüan troops to handle the nationwide breakdown of order that set China aflame in the early 1350s. Some Mongolian units were undisciplined and poorly prepared at the outset, but if they lost some early encounters with the insurrectionary forces, they soon won a good many more. Yüan military units of every description and national origin were pressed into service, and especially in south China, local defense militias, Chinese armies recruited for the occasion, played a major part in

36 YS, 66, pp. 1646–54. This remains untranslated, as far as I know, but is briefly discussed in Joseph Needham et al., *Science and civilization in China*, vol. 4, *Physics and physical technology*, pt. 3, *Civil engineering and nautics* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 325, 344; and Yang Lien-sheng, *Excursions in sinology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 222–3.

37 See the chapters by Frederick W. Mote and Edward L. Dreyer in F. W. Mote and D. C. Twitchett, eds., *The Ming dynasty, 1368–1644*, pt. 1, vol. 7 of *The Cambridge history of China* (Cambridge, 1988).

38 For example, Hsiao, *The military establishment of the Yüan dynasty*, p. 63.

turning back the rebel tide. The rebellions could not have been handled otherwise.³⁹

It is remarkable that Toghtō managed not only to create a nationwide apparatus of pacification but also to keep effective control over it. By always assembling and disassembling the larger military groups, by constantly transferring commanders from place to place, by not allowing the heads of any single government agency or princely establishment to dominate any major operation, and by carefully keeping supply organizationally distinct from other military operations, Toghtō was able to prevent a downward slippage of military power into regional hands and to prevent military commanders from establishing provincial power bases. The largest, or at least the symbolically most important, campaigns Toghtō chose to command in person: He led a successful expedition in 1352 to recapture Hsü-chou (in present-day north-west Kiangsu Province), an especially critical administrative center, and to restore order in the Huai valley area.

While all these military operations were going on, the maritime grain shipments from south China were ended. Rather than negotiate with the pirate Fang Kuo-chen, who was still active, with a view to resuming the shipments to the capital, Toghtō decided instead to make a rice basket of the greater metropolitan area itself. This decision was consistent with Toghtō's whole centralist approach to administration. It was a colossal and extremely costly undertaking, being allocated five million ingots in new paper currency – two and a half times more than the cost of rerouting the Yellow River.

North China was unusually wet in the Yüan period, and earlier trials had shown that rice could indeed be grown there. In 1353, a supervisory branch office of agriculture (*fen ssu nung ssu*) was set up there, which recruited two thousand dike builders and paddy farmers from the south for a year's paid service as technical advisers to the native farmers, who were unfamiliar with rice cultivation, and other farmers were brought in from Shantung to augment the local population. Other state farm systems were established in Honan Province and in southern Manchuria. It is not wholly clear how successful these new state-run farms actually became, because of Toghtō's imminent political downfall and the continuation of the civil wars, but as a bold plan to revolutionize north China's age-old farming traditions overnight, it is an example of Toghtō's vision of the limitless possibilities of inspired government.

Late in 1354, Toghtō took personal command of a second grand military expedition, this time against the city of Kao-yu (just north of Yang-chou, on

39 Details are given in Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, pp. 104 ff.

the Grand Canal), which was occupied by a former salt smuggler, Chang Shih-ch'eng. This expedition, as it turned out, was Toghtō's last official act. Had the siege of Kao-yu in fact forced Chang Shih-ch'eng's surrender, which was all but inevitable, the back of the nationwide rebellions would have been resoundingly broken. Even as it was, those rebels still active had been chased into hiding or were barely surviving. But while the siege was still in progress, in a stunning act of misjudgment and bad political timing, Toghōn Temür suddenly issued Toghtō an order of dismissal and banishment. Toghtō, unfortunately for the dynasty, obeyed. The siege thereupon disintegrated. The Yüan lost the military and political initiative. The rebellions, all but quashed, took on a new form and new life. It is from this crucible that the successor dynasty, the Ming, emerged and thirteen years later reunified China.

Why was Toghtō dismissed? There seem to be several considerations, probably one of which was a well-established five-year cycle of administrative turnover. Over a period of five years or so, corruption, favoritism, and personal ill feelings seem to have reached a critical point within each successive late Yüan ruling faction; this was certainly the case in Toghtō's circle, in that it was Khama, one of his own disaffected adherents, who took a leading role in the palace intrigues that led to his downfall. Moreover, Toghtō's ambitious programs had pretty much run their course and achieved their purposes. The Yellow River was tamed, and the various insurrectionary movements were all but destroyed. There was nothing left of Toghtō's national agenda but details. It was time for a change.

In this connection, one must reckon with those in government opposed to Toghtō not so much on personal grounds but because they held different beliefs about the appropriate goals and operating procedures of government. Toghtō's ambitious activism demanded discipline and centralization. The Censorate was held in check; provincial and local officials were given very little initiative; and military commanders were given the least possible freedom of action. There is clear evidence that at least some of the officials who had served the administrations of 1344-9 disliked Toghtō's tight controls and resented the protection he gave his own loyal partisans. These men now demanded a return of the decentralized mode of governance and a greater scope for the institutional, regional, and personal initiative that characterized it. This philosophical conflict reminded some contemporaries of the struggle between the reform and conservative factions in the late Northern Sung.

Toghōn Temür also had his own reasons for removing Toghtō, who, like his uncle Bayan before him, had grown very powerful. Perhaps inadvertently, he had shown this power to the emperor by delaying his agreement to the formal investiture of Ayushiridara as heir apparent. Toghōn Temür was an-

gered and upset. What was it that had poisoned relationships between the chancellor and the imperial house?

By all the signs, Toghōn Temür, now thirty-four years of age, had withdrawn into a kind of semiretirement.⁴⁰ He was regularly participating with a select circle of adepts, and an all-female dance ensemble and orchestra, in the sexual rituals of Tibetan Buddhism. On at least one occasion, he sponsored a holy circumambulation of the imperial palace grounds by a group of 108 monks. He was also having built a huge pleasure boat (the model for it was of his own making) for sailing on the lake in the imperial palace, and he himself also had a major hand in the design and fashioning of a large, technically elaborate clepsydra, or water clock.⁴¹ Perhaps in order to accommodate the new boat, a costly project was later undertaken to dredge the palace waterways.

Meanwhile, Toghōn Temür authorized a series of steps to allow his oldest son, Ayushiridara, to learn about and assume some responsibilities for government. In 1354 Ayushiridara was about fifteen years old. At the age of nine he had been ordered to learn Uighur writing (*Wei-wu-erh wen tzu*), and at the age of ten, Chinese. Shortly after this, in 1349, with elaborate and solemn ceremony, a special Chinese-style academy was set up in the palace for Ayushiridara, with a tutorial staff of nine men. A senior tutor, Li Hao-wen, compiled four textbooks on Chinese subjects especially for his young pupil.

Four years later a Household Administration for the heir apparent (*Chan-shih yüan*) was established, with a staff of no fewer than eighty-three officials and clerks. Other, independent offices for the heir apparent controlled a ceremonial guard plus two regular guard units, and in addition there were assigned to Ayushiridara 250 housemen (*ayimagh kesigden*) of his own. The housemen received 27,500 ingots in cash grants, and Ayushiridara's consort, 100,000 more. An unused palace was selected and repaired for Ayushiridara to live in. He was given the privilege of appointing his own officials, and late in 1354 (while Toghtō was out on campaign) he was given the power of review (*ch'i*) over all official business sent up to his father, the emperor. In sum, Toghōn Temür created by degrees a new, large, and costly center of political influence within the palace, headed by his designated heir. All that remained was to conduct the final official ceremonies of Ayushiridara's installation as heir apparent.

The obvious inference is that Toghtō delayed those ceremonies because he considered the rise of Ayushiridara a threat to himself. Yet Ayushiridara and Toghtō were actually very close. Ayushiridara's childhood was spent in

40 In one view, the emperor's interest in government peaked during Toghtō's first incumbency (1341-4). See Fujishima Tareki, "Gen no Junrei to sono jidai," *Ōtani gakubō*, 49 (1970), pp. 50-65.

41 Joseph Needham et al., *Heavenly clockwork: The great astronomical clocks of medieval China*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1986), p. 140.

Toghtō's house, and when at age ten he was given his earliest tuition in Chinese books (the *Hsiao ching*), his instructor was Toghtō's family tutor, Cheng Shen.⁴² Moreover, Toghtō personally contributed 122,000 ingots toward the building of a Buddhist temple outside one of the north gates of Ta-tu, so that prayers might continually be offered for Ayushiridara's well-being.

Another possible reason for the delay may have been that because Ayushiridara was not a son by a principal consort, Toghtō considered him unqualified. Ayushiridara's mother was a former palace maid and tea server of Korean nationality, of whom Toghōn Temür was very fond. He had made her second empress (*ti erh huang hou*) in 1340, an act that many people had opposed, in view of the low place that the Mongols had assigned to the Koreans as a race and the effect of her new status on the complex issue of Yüan relations with Korea.⁴³ Toghōn Temür's principal empress, a self-effacing Mongolian woman, bore only one male child, who died in infancy. The dates of his short life are not known, but if he were alive in 1353-4, then Toghtō's hesitancy on the investiture question becomes understandable. But all this is speculation: Toghtō may simply have been too busy dealing with the empire's crises to schedule the event. All that really matters is that the emperor suspected the delay to have been deliberate. In April 1355, after Toghtō's removal, the solemn investiture ceremony was at last carried out.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE YUAN

The emperor may have considered the dismissal of Toghtō a fairly routine measure, something he had done on a number of occasions in the past, without the integrity of the dynasty having been compromised as a result. But the dismissal of Toghtō in fact put an end to the Yüan as an integrated political system, largely for the reason that unlike the period of decentralization from 1344 to 1349, various new military and administrative structures had been created in many parts of China in response to the insurrections after 1351 that had both the manpower and resources to act independently and soon did so. Official appointments at the regional level and below could no longer be made by the authorities in Ta-tu as a matter of central bureaucratic prerogative, as had normally been the case earlier. The provinces of China fell into the hands of autonomous regional figures (warlords is perhaps the right word), some of whom had earlier been rebels and others commanders of antirebel forces. From 1355 to 1368, Yüan central government did the best

42 Sung Lien, *Sung Wen-hsien kung ch'üan chi*, 49, pp. 6b-11a.

43 For the Korean side of this story, see Hsiao, *Yüan tai shih hsin t'an*, pp. 231-62.

it could to retain at least the token loyalty of its self-supporting commanders in the field and to negotiate diplomatically the nominal surrender of former rebels, men like Fang Kuo-chen and Chang Shih-ch'eng. Meanwhile, the leaders of other rebel movements (e.g., Ch'en Yu-liang and Chu Yüan-chang) emerged after Toghtō's downfall to build new and stronger regional governments and, on the whole, to maintain consistently hostile attitudes toward the Yüan. Thus the Yüan central government itself became in many respects no more than a regional government, controlling in China only the capital and its outlying areas, although it retained to the end a residual legitimacy as the government of all of China (see Chapter 9).

The most significant development of Toghōn Temür's last years in China (1355–68) was the rise of the Ming dynastic movement based in Nanking and, in particular, the alliance it struck in 1360 with the leaders of what was in fact a fundamentalist, Confucian moral–political revolution. This revolution took shape in the general conditions of late Yüan rule, in the insurrections of 1351 to 1354, and in the dynastic disintegration that followed Toghtō's dismissal.

The problem of the origin of this moral revolution deserves more than the few paragraphs available here, because it involves such subtle filaments as the history of society and family, taxation and resource mobilization, legal history, and the development of Confucian thought.⁴⁴ Suffice it to say that this revolution gathered its force at the grass roots, principally in southeast China. One early manifestation of it can be traced to 1342 and the successful demonstration of a pilot project in tax and service reform in Shao-hsing Prefecture, a negligible producer of revenue.

But in this small crack in the giant structure, as it were, Confucian-minded activists in both office and private life effected in the face of many obstacles an equitable reapportionment of fiscal obligations, by combining the reform with a campaign of moral reawakening. The local community was deliberately polarized into good and evil through the revival of the ancient village drinking ceremony (*hsiang yin chiu li*), in which the selfish and recalcitrant were publicly exposed and disgraced and the virtuous were honored. This project was repeated in 1350 in Chin-hua and Ch'u-chou prefectures; here Yü Ch'üeh, the Tangut encountered earlier on the non-Chinese portion of the *chin-shih* list of 1333, was a guiding official hand. Again, the work was exhausting; the revenue benefit to the Yüan government was almost nil; and

44 Recent work in this direction includes Paul Heng-chao Ch'en, *Chinese legal tradition under the Mongols: The code of 1291 as reconstructed* (Princeton, 1979); Jennifer Holmgren, "Observations on marriage and inheritance practices in early Mongol and Yüan society with particular reference to the levirate," *Journal of Asian History*, 20 (1986), pp. 127–92; and John D. Langlois, Jr., "Political thought in Chin-hua under Mongol rule," in *China under Mongol rule*, ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton, 1981), pp. 137–85.

the effort was made at so low a level in the official administrative hierarchy (and so irrelevant to the thrust of Toghtō's central planning) that it quite escaped the notice of the court. However, it was celebrated as a great moral triumph in local Confucian writings, and these radiated disproportionately wide influences. If the Yüan authorities in Ta-tu took little note of these influences, the Ming founders soon would.⁴⁵

It is also in the writings of local Confucians that one discovers "public" reactions to the mass insurrections and the breakdown of Yüan central authority after 1355. There was a general consensus that the insurrections were an inevitable popular response to the size, cost, and corruption of the Yüan government and to the heavy and iniquitous revenue demands that this produced. To remedy these abuses it was generally agreed that the costs of government must be cut severely and that all corruption be resolutely purged from bureaucracy. (The Yüan state was never in a position to proceed very far along these lines, and eventually it was the Ming state that made frugality a guiding policy.)

As to the regionalization of Yüan rule after 1355, Confucian opinion was divided, and there was indeed a dilemma in it. Some contemporary Confucian writers argued that the appointment of autonomous regional warlords like Fang Kuo-ch'en or Chang Shih-ch'eng as Yüan provincial officials was congruent with the ancient Chou pattern of "feudal" decentralization and hence legitimate, provided that the regional leaders obeyed the court and conducted themselves in accordance with the strictest ethical standards. It was believed they would do this if the Confucians could exert enough moral pressure on them. This line of argument was totally unrealistic, but it promised a reduction of armed conflict and was attractive enough to help keep Yüan loyalism alive in many parts of south China into the 1360s.

A small but powerful minority of Confucians argued the opposite, and this was a voice of moral revolution. In their view, regionalization was no good at all; it simply masked the perpetuation of the iniquity, the acquisitiveness, the self-aggrandizement, and the chronic favoritism and corruption that had brought the Yüan to its present sorry state in the first place. A dynasty that rewarded criminals with the highest of its offices and honors must forfeit all claim to the moral leadership of society.

One of the most forceful and articulate partisans of this line was Liu Chi, the thirty-eighth name (of fifty) on the Chinese part of the *chin shih* list of 1333. Liu Chi had held several low-ranking local and provincial posts through the early 1350s, in which he had ample opportunity to nourish his

45 John W. Dardess, "Confucianism, local reform, and centralization in late Yüan Chekiang, 1342-59," in *Yüan thought: Chinese thought and religion under the Mongols*, ed. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York, 1982), pp. 327-74.

outrage at the malfeasance and cover-ups in which he found many of his official superiors engaging. He was early on so implacable an enemy of Fang Kuo-chen that on one occasion he was imprisoned after the court decided, in the interest of preserving the peace, to try to accommodate the pirate rather than suppress him. Later, in 1356, Liu was appointed to the modest post of registrar in the Chiang-Che Branch Bureau of Military Affairs that had just been established in Hangchow (one of many examples of the proliferation of Yüan bureaucracy in the crisis years of the 1350s). As registrar, Liu Chi was at once sent to inland Chekiang, where a superior, Shih-mo I-sun, administrative assistant in the same agency, had charge of several prefectures. What follows is a singular and crucial episode in late Yüan history.

It is important to try to reconstruct this scene because of its direct implications for the future of China. Far away in Ta-tu, the Yüan central government coped as best it could with a very confused national situation. Provincial officials now enjoyed plenipotentiary powers. As of March 1356, all ethnic qualifications were dropped for local official appointees. Rebels abandoned the war-wrecked Huai region of central China to set up base areas elsewhere: Chu Yüan-chang, leading what was still to some extent a religious sectarian movement, crossed the Yangtze River and took Nanking; Chang Shih-ch'eng, saved at Kao-yu by the emperor's cashiering of Toghtō, came south and took Soochow. The Chiang-Che provincial governor Dash Temür, a Confucian-trained Khangli aristocrat, desperate for expedients, tried setting the warlords against one another, cooperating first with one and then with another. In 1356 he induced Fang Kuo-chen to help in a fight against Chang Shih-ch'eng. The Chiang-nan Branch Censorate liked this strategy. But the Chiang-Che Branch Bureau of Military Affairs resolutely opposed it, in part because the governor himself had regularly appointed to that body men who hated Fang Kuo-chen. Each agency had its own army. In addition, there existed independent militia forces, which compounded the confusion by their penchant for unpredictably switching sides. This is how badly fragmented Yüan authority had become by 1356.

Liu Chi and Shih-mo I-sun and their colleagues occupied one small splinter near the bottom of this shattering system; yet it was they, and they alone, who possessed the clarity of moral vision to advertise openly their thought and action in the provincial interior as the only possible working model of the kind of effort needed to bring about a true and lasting restoration of Yüan rule in China. In the provincial interior, good and evil completely disentangled themselves and migrated to the opposite ends of an almost Manichaeian polarity. All good was altruistic and centralizing. All evil was self-interested and particularistic or regionalizing. One would achieve local pacification by placing all resources and leadership at the head of the forces

of good and directing them passionately and relentlessly against the forces of evil (i.e., landlords and "bandits" believed to be in league with Fang Kuo-chen). Shih-mo I-sun was infinitely more than an administrative assistant in the Branch Bureau of Military Affairs in an obscure corner of southeast China. He was, according to Liu Chi, a world-saving hero whose true destiny was to rectify and restore the Yüan dynasty, just as two thousand years earlier, Duke Huan of Ch'i had rescued the failing Chou.

In 1357, the Yüan court agreed to give minor promotions to Shih-mo I-sun and Liu Chi and their circle, but it refused to raise them to a more influential level in the Yüan bureaucracy. The policy of regionalization would continue. Liu Chi thereupon resigned in despair and, as did several other Confucian theoreticians from the provincial interior at this time, wrote out his thoughts on morals and politics. In 1360, these ideologues joined the future Ming founder, Chu Yüan-chang, who had just invaded their territory. And so it was the first Ming emperor, rather than Toghön Temür, who made effective use of the techniques of tax equalization and popular mobilization that had been recognized in Chiang-Che Province since 1342, who adopted the cause of moral absolutism the Yüan had refused in 1357, and who eventually fastened upon China a centralization of an unprecedentedly harsh kind.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION: WHY DID THE YÜAN DYNASTY FALL?

For some years after its retreat to the steppe in 1368, the Yüan court maintained its claim to China, but it never seems to have gone beyond self-serving fantasy to make any sober-minded effort to understand the reasons for the catastrophic collapse of its rule there. By contrast, that collapse was so fresh and vivid in the minds of the Ming founders that to an appreciable extent, they explicitly fashioned the Ming to counteract what they seriously thought to have been the causes of the Yüan breakdown. Put simply, their prescription was that if bureaucracy were cut in size and unflinchingly purged of any sign of selfish and corrupt behavior, and if the emperor himself took direct charge of things and acted without fear or favor (as Toghön Temür had most lamentably failed to do), the ruling system would truly reinforce fundamental Confucian moral principles, and a millennium of peace and plenty would ensue.

Were these Ming policies based on a correct or fair assessment of the Yüan's shortcomings? Did the Yüan collapse because Toghön Temür ne-

46 John W. Dardess, *Confucianism and autocracy: Professional elites in the founding of the Ming dynasty* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983).

glected his duties, allowing factional struggle in the bureaucracy to intensify and corruption to grow unchecked? Perhaps. At least, it does seem possible to interpret broadly the events of the 1350s and 1360s as an example of what may happen when a large, privileged ruling elite is faced with worsening deficits in its national resource base: A division of the realm into autonomous parts does afford regional elites closer access to resources.

It would be hard indeed to build a persuasive case on behalf of Toghōn Temür's ability to provide inspiring leadership. Toghtō tackled energetically the problem of maintaining continued central control over national resources and personnel, in part, of course, through the desperate expedient of printing more and more unbacked paper money, an inflationary measure that could not have continued indefinitely (in fact, paper money had already become worthless and ceased to circulate in 1356). It might be argued that the integrity of the Yüan realm was sustained as long as it was only by the extraordinary personal talents of Toghtō and that, inopportune as his dismissal may have been, centralized Yüan rule would have not long survived him anyway. The lessons that the Ming founders drew from the chaotic events of the late Yüan did have some rational basis.

But it may be worth recalling that the fourteenth century was calamitous everywhere. Within and beyond the various Mongol empires, from Iceland and England at one end of Eurasia to Japan at the other, societies were suffering plagues, famines, agricultural decline, depopulation, and civil upheaval. Few societies were spared at least some of the symptoms. China was spared none of them. No fewer than thirty-six years in the fourteenth century had exceptionally severe winters, more than in any other century on record.⁴⁷ In the greater Yellow River region, major floods and droughts seem to have occurred with unprecedented frequency in the fourteenth century.⁴⁸ Serious epidemics broke out in the 1340s and 1350s.⁴⁹ Famines were recorded for almost every year of Toghōn Temür's reign, leading to great mortality and costing the government vast sums in relief.⁵⁰ These natural disasters created huge numbers of uprooted and impoverished people, fodder for the revolts that wracked the realm in the 1350s.

The various late Yüan regimes all tried seriously to alleviate these disasters. None ignored them. Yüan medical and food relief efforts, by all appearances, were both conscientious and sophisticated. Indeed, the history of Toghōn Temür's reign raises the question whether any regime could have

47 See H. H. Lamb, *Climate: Present, past and future* (London, 1977), vol. 2, p. 447. For details on the extremely severe cold during Toghōn Temür's reign, see YS, 51, pp. 1097–8.

48 Chao Kang, *Man and land in Chinese history: An economic analysis* (Stanford, 1986), p. 203.

49 YS, 51, p. 1111.

50 YS, 51, pp. 1109–10.

coped with these repeated large-scale disasters any better than the Yüan did. It might well be the case that the long-term cumulative effects of such repeated natural calamities were too great for any government to handle and that if normal conditions had prevailed in China, the Yüan dynasty might have lasted much longer than it did.

The principal factors and the chains of causation in the fall of the Yüan will certainly be studied and debated for a long time to come. Yet we should recollect that the Yüan was not in any direct sense a victim of the blind forces of history. In 1368 it was forcibly driven out of China by a consciously extremist, morally revolutionary movement that, by the most diligent efforts, through sheer determination and hard struggle, took every advantage of the palpable weaknesses of the Yüan government of the 1350s and 1360s to impose its own vision of peace and order on China. The Yüan government itself had been given an opportunity to endorse that same vision, and it had understandably declined it. In the direct sense, the Yüan fell at last because the Ming founders willed it.